



C H A P T E R 4

THE COUNTRY SCHOOLHOUSE WAS THREE MILES FROM MY UNCLE'S FARM. It stood in a clearing in the woods, and would hold about twenty-five boys and girls. We attended the school with more or less regularity once or twice a week, in summer, walking to it in the cool of the morning by the forest paths and back in the growing dark. All the pupils brought their dinners in baskets and sat in the shade of the trees at noon and ate them. It is the part of my education which I look back upon with the most satisfaction.

As I have said, I spent some part of every year at the farm until I was twelve or thirteen years old. The life which I led there with my cousins was full of charm, and so is the memory of it yet. I can call back the mystery of the deep woods, the earthly smells, the faint odors of the wild flowers, the shining look of rainwashed leaves, the sound of drops when the wind shook the trees, the far-off noise of birds, the glimpses of disturbed wild creatures hurrying through the grass—I can call it all back and make it as real as it ever was, and as blessed. I can see the woods in their autumn dress of purple and gold and red, and I can hear the sound of the fallen leaves as we walked through them, and I can feel the pounding rain, upon my head, of the nuts as they fell when the wind blew them loose. I know the look of Uncle Dan'l's

kitchen as it was at night, and I can see the white and black children with the firelight playing on their faces and the shadows dancing on the walls.

I can remember the bare wooden stairway in my uncle's house, and the turn to the left above the landing, and the sloping roof over my bed, and the squares of moonlight on the floor, and the white cold world of snow outside. I can remember the noise of the wind and the shaking of the house on stormy nights, and how warm and happy one felt, under the blankets, listening. I can remember how very dark that room was, in the dark of the moon—and on summer nights how pleasant it was to lie and listen to the rain on that roof, and enjoy the white glory of the lightning and the majestic crashing of the thunder. I remember the hunts for game and birds, and how we turned out, mornings, while it was still dark, and how chilly it was, and how often I regretted that I was well enough to go. Sounding a tin horn brought twice as many dogs as were needed, and in their happiness they raced about and knocked small people down and made no end of unnecessary noise. But presently the gray dawn stole over the world, the birds piped up, then the sun rose and poured light and comfort all around, everything was fresh and dewy and smelled good, and life was a joy again, and we would arrive back, tired, hungry, and just in time for breakfast.